The Emerging Markets OMS Guide

What's Different in South East Asia and India and What to Do About It

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Founder, GSOT, 2026

About this guide

I have spent most of my career implementing order management systems, and a significant part of that time has been in South East Asia and India. What I kept noticing was the same set of problems appearing in the same places, often in businesses that had implemented solid OMS platforms and still found them struggling in this environment.

The operating model in SEA and India is genuinely different from what most OMS programmes are designed for. Not in every respect, but in enough of the right ones to matter. Payment behaviour, last-mile logistics, inventory reliability, marketplace dependency, peak event intensity, return volumes: each of these creates requirements that Western OMS logic tends to underestimate or ignore.

This guide collects the questions I get asked most often, and tries to answer them honestly. It is not a product pitch and it is not a theoretical framework. It is based on what I have seen across more than 50 OMS implementations, including a number of programmes across this region.

If you are thinking about order management in SEA or India, whether you are evaluating options, mid-implementation, or trying to understand why your current setup is not performing as expected, I hope it is useful.

PART 1

THE BASICS

1

Is OMS really that different in South East Asia and India compared to the West?

Yes, in ways that matter operationally. The surface-level retail model can look similar: you have brands, channels, stock, and customers who want their orders delivered reliably. But the operating environment underneath is different in enough of the right places to make a material difference to how an OMS needs to behave.

In Western markets, OMS programmes tend to be designed around certain assumptions: payment confirmation is reliable, addresses are standardised, carriers are reasonably predictable, and inventory accuracy across fulfilment nodes is broadly trustworthy. In SEA and India, several of those assumptions do not hold consistently.

That does not mean you need a completely different OMS philosophy. It means you need a more grounded application of the right principles, with specific adaptations in the areas where the environment diverges. The programmes I have seen struggle in this region are almost always the ones that underestimated how much adaptation was needed.

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What do you mean when you say OMS is more than just software in these markets?

In any market, an OMS is not just a system for routing orders. It is the decision layer sitting between channels, payments, inventory, fulfilment locations, carriers, customer communication, returns and service operations. It decides, in real time, whether the promise your business made to a customer can be kept.

In emerging markets, that role becomes more critical because the operating environment is less even. Payment certainty varies by method. Address quality varies by geography. Inventory accuracy varies by node. Carrier reliability varies by zone. The OMS has to make good decisions across all of that, often under pressure.

OMS is where the customer promise meets operational reality. In a stable Western environment, that meeting point is relatively predictable. In SEA and India, it is where most of the hard work happens.

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Can’t we just take our existing OMS and configure it for SEA?

For some things, yes. The core principles of good OMS design travel well: a clean order lifecycle model, event-driven architecture, decoupled integrations, rules-based allocation, strong operational dashboards. These are worth carrying across and should form the backbone of any programme in this region.

But some capabilities need more than configuration. Payment-to-release logic, address and serviceability intelligence, carrier orchestration that responds to delivery risk, inventory confidence scoring by node, and reverse logistics built into the core orchestration model: these tend to need redesigning rather than reconfiguring. Many programmes discover this later than they should.

The honest answer is that the distinction between what can be configured and what needs to be redesigned is one of the most important judgements an OMS programme in this region has to make. Getting it wrong in either direction is costly.

PART 2

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ON THE GROUND

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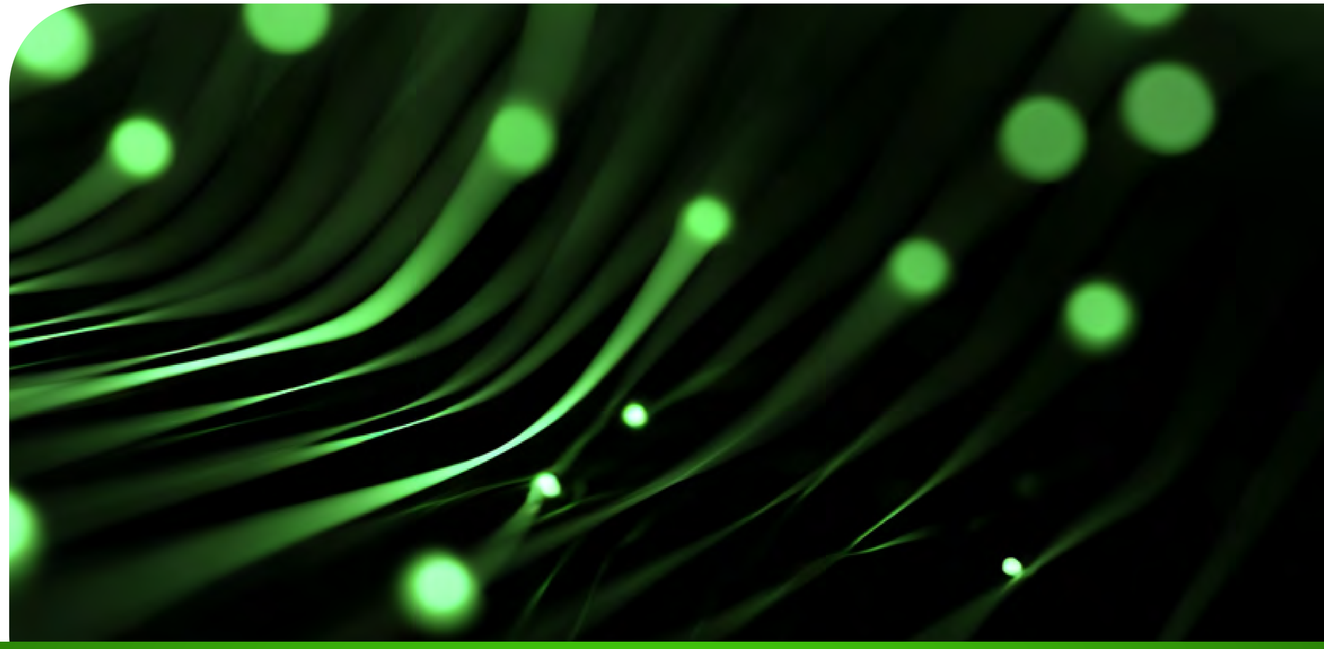
How does the channel mix in SEA change what an OMS needs to do?

In many Western markets, a brand's own website anchors the channel mix. Marketplaces matter, but they are typically one channel among several. In SEA, that relationship is often inverted. Shopee, Lazada, TikTok Shop and similar platforms can account for the majority of a retailer's order volume, and in some businesses they are effectively the primary sales channel.

That changes what the OMS needs to do. It is not just handling orders from your own website. It is managing different service level requirements, cancellation windows, seller rating implications, fulfilment expectations and penalty structures across multiple platforms simultaneously.

Marketplace penalties and seller rating failures can affect revenue and brand performance directly. The OMS cannot just be connected to these channels. It has to understand how they work and support the operational controls that marketplace selling requires.



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Why does payment behaviour create problems that most OMS platforms aren’t designed for?

Most Western OMS platforms are designed around the assumption that a placed order with payment confirmed is a committed order ready for fulfilment. In SEA and India, that assumption breaks in several ways.

Cash on delivery remains significant in some markets. Wallet-based payments and UPI transactions can time out or fail silently. Bank-related delays can mean a payment appears confirmed but is not yet settled. Some payment methods carry a materially higher cancellation risk before the order reaches the warehouse.

The practical consequence is that not every placed order is fulfilment-ready. Releasing an order to a carrier before payment is genuinely confirmed creates waste, cost and customer friction. OMS design in these markets needs to separate order capture from fulfilment release much more carefully, with explicit logic for holding, verifying, retrying and releasing based on payment status, fraud signals and ageing rules.

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What makes the last mile so much harder to manage here?

The last mile in SEA and India operates in a much less even environment than most Western OMS models assume. A few things create the most operational impact:

Addresses are often incomplete or non-standard. Delivery depends on landmarks, phone calls and local knowledge rather than postcode-level precision.

Carrier coverage and reliability varies significantly, not just by region but sometimes by neighbourhood, order value, payment type or product category.

Island and remote geography in parts of SEA creates serviceability complexity that changes regularly.

Failed delivery rates in some zones are high enough to materially affect operational cost and customer satisfaction.

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Why is inventory accuracy a bigger challenge in SEA and India than in Western markets?

Western OMS models tend to assume that inventory is reasonably accurate across warehouses and stores: that what the system says is available is broadly what is physically there. In SEA and India, that assumption can be risky.

Store inventory can be less reliable than warehouse inventory. Backroom processes vary by location. Marketplace stock feeds can lag behind physical reality. Operational discipline across a distributed fulfilment network is harder to maintain consistently. In some businesses, the gap between system stock and physical stock is still wide enough to cause regular fulfilment failures.

This creates a fundamental OMS question: should the system promise from every fulfilment node, or only from the nodes it can trust? In SEA and India, inventory orchestration often needs to be more cautious. Safety buffers, node confidence scoring, selective sourcing and strong exception handling become far more important than in a stable Western environment. A clever allocation engine is useful. An honest one is more valuable.

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Why do returns need to be treated as a core capability rather than an afterthought?

In many OMS programmes, returns are treated as something to design later. That is a bigger mistake in SEA and India than it is in most Western markets.

Returns, exchanges, failed deliveries and reverse pickups are part of the daily operating reality here. In fashion especially, reverse logistics can be one of the biggest drivers of customer cost, service effort and stock delay. An OMS that cannot orchestrate returns properly slows down the whole order ecosystem.

What that means in practice is that the OMS needs to support more than recording a return. It needs to handle pickup orchestration, reverse status tracking, return-to-origin scenarios, quality check decisions, refund triggers, resale or quarantine routing, and customer communication throughout the reverse journey. These are not optional extras: they are core operational requirements.

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How do peak trading events in SEA differ from what Western OMS programmes plan for?

Peak planning in Western markets tends to centre on Black Friday, Cyber Monday and Christmas: predictable annual events with well-understood demand patterns. In SEA and India, peaks are more intense, more frequent and more fragmented.

Diwali, Ramadan and Eid, payday cycles, 9.9, 10.10, 11.11 and 12.12 campaigns, major marketplace sale events, influencer-led drops and app flash sales can all create significant order spikes within very short windows. Some of these peaks exceed what Western peak planning typically prepares for in terms of concentration of volume.

The OMS needs to be designed for control under pressure, not just normal trading days. Order throttling, reservation windows, smart back-order handling, peak-specific allocation rules and clear exception dashboards are not nice-to-haves in this environment. They are operational necessities.

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Why does customer communication need to be part of the OMS rather than handled separately?

In Western OMS design, customer communication is often handled outside the core order flow, typically through a CRM or marketing automation platform. In SEA and India, communication is much more operational.

SMS, WhatsApp, app notifications and marketplace messages can directly affect whether a delivery succeeds, whether a return pickup happens, and whether a customer stays satisfied through an exception. Customers may expect faster, more direct and more frequent updates than Western models assume. Delivery agents may need live phone confirmation before they attempt delivery. Service teams need clear status visibility to act quickly when something goes wrong.

Communication is not just a CRM matter in this context. It is part of the fulfilment process, and it needs to be treated as such in OMS design.

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What compliance and local process complexities should we expect?

Even when the high-level retail model looks similar across markets, local rules create practical complexity that affects OMS design. This varies by country and product category, but common areas include invoice and documentation requirements, tax treatment by state or country, marketplace-specific documentation rules, product-category restrictions, local return policies, and cross-border handling requirements for some SEA flows.

Global templates are useful as a starting point, but business rules need to be local. The programmes that get this right typically build a common OMS foundation with deliberate market-level flexibility built in from the start, rather than trying to retrofit local rules onto a global model that was not designed to accommodate them.

PART 3

WHAT YOU CAN CARRY OVER

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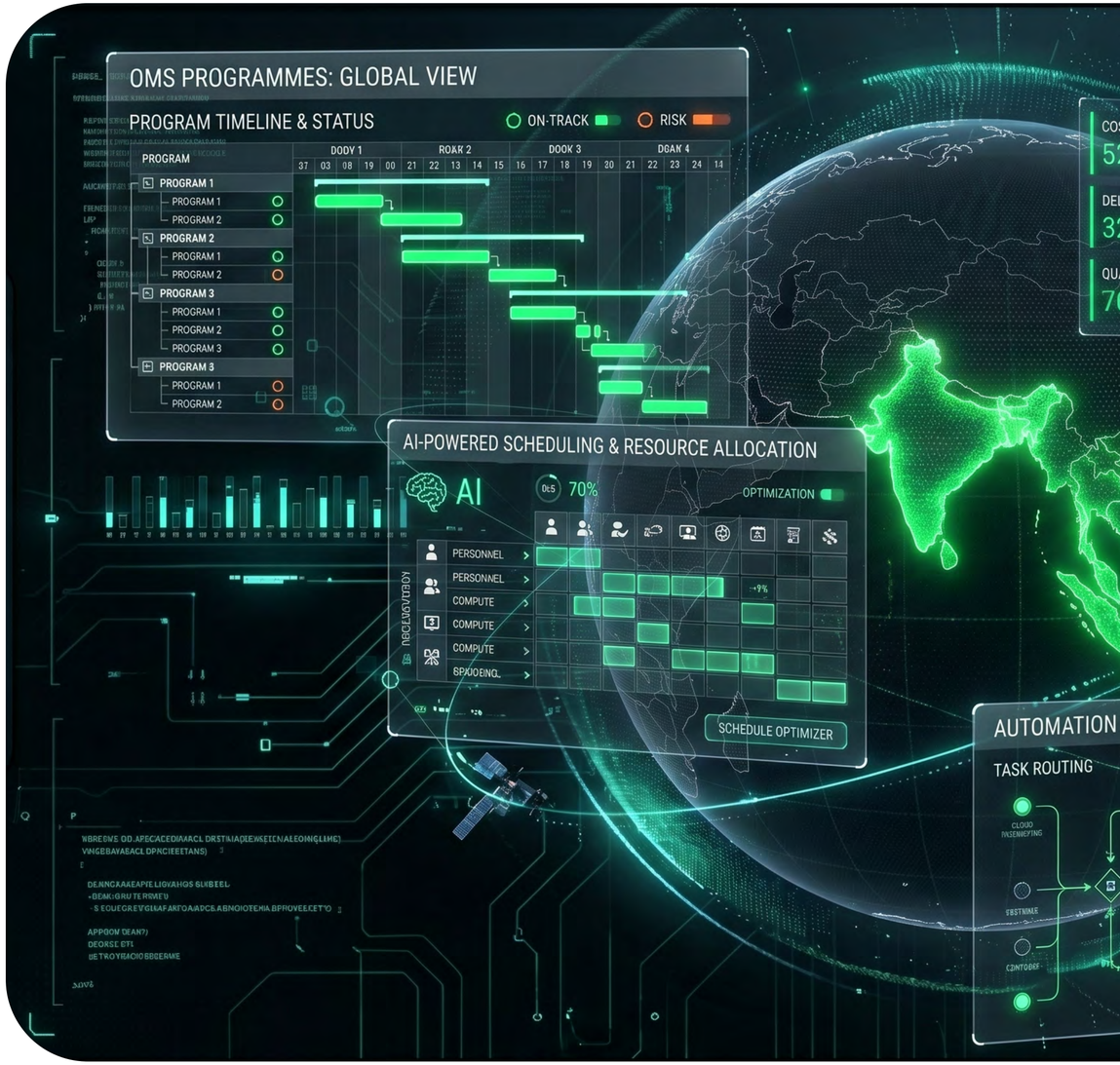
Is there anything from Western OMS programmes we can actually reuse?

Quite a lot. Emerging markets do not need a completely different OMS philosophy. They need a more grounded application of the right principles, adapted where the environment genuinely requires it.

The risk I see most often is not that programmes carry over too much from Western models: it is that they either reject everything and start from scratch without good reason, or they carry over too much and discover later that certain assumptions do not hold. The right approach is to be deliberate about which principles you are keeping and why.



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Which specific capabilities transfer well?

Several core elements remain very valuable in SEA and India:

A clean order lifecycle model

Clear, well-defined transitions between created, validated, allocated, released, shipped, delivered, returned, cancelled and refunded states are essential in every market. Emerging markets often need more intermediate checkpoints and more exception states, but the underlying discipline of a clean state model is just as important here.

Decoupled integrations

Separating the OMS core from carriers, marketplaces, ERPs, warehouse systems and customer tools is just as important here. The local environment may be messier, but that is exactly why clean abstraction matters. You need to be able to swap out a carrier or add a marketplace without touching the core.

Standard operating discipline

Runbooks, peak planning, support models, incident response and service review processes are just as useful here as in the West. In some respects, more so, because the operating environment creates more exceptions to manage.

Observability and operational dashboards

Strong dashboards, alerts and exception queues are non-negotiable in this environment. You need visibility into stuck orders, failed payment confirmations, carrier rejections, allocation failures, pickup issues and refund delays. Without it, teams end up managing through spreadsheets and escalations.

Event-driven architecture

This remains one of the strongest foundations for OMS at scale. Orders, payments, inventory movements, shipment milestones and returns should all publish clear events. This makes it easier to manage complexity, recover from failure and connect multiple platforms. In SEA and India, where the operational environment is more fragmented, this architectural principle becomes even more useful.

Rules-based allocation and promising

This carries across well, but the rules need more local inputs: payment type, delivery zone risk, node confidence, marketplace SLA requirements, carrier strength and return history.

PART 4

WHAT NEEDS REDESIGNING

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What usually needs to be redesigned rather than just localised?

Many programmes go wrong at exactly this point. They describe their OMS as global with local configuration, but the local requirements are so different in practice that configuration alone is not enough.

The capabilities that most often need deeper redesign rather than localisation fall into six areas. Each one is predictable: these are not surprises that emerge during go-live. They are knowable in advance if the design process asks the right questions about the operating environment.

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What does that look like in practice for each of those areas?

Payment-to-release controls

Not every order that looks paid is fulfilment-ready. The OMS needs explicit hold, retry, verify and release logic that accounts for payment method, confirmation status, fraud signals and ageing. This is not a configuration option in most standard OMS platforms: it needs to be designed in.

Address and serviceability intelligence

Address validation, geocoding, landmark capture and serviceability checks need to sit inside the order flow, not be bolted on afterwards. The OMS needs to know whether it can actually fulfil to a given address before it confirms the order, not after the carrier attempts delivery.

Carrier orchestration

Carrier choice needs to react dynamically to area, promise date, payment method, product type, capacity and delivery risk. A static carrier allocation rule will not hold across the geographic and operational variance that SEA and India present.

Reverse logistics logic

Returns, failed deliveries and return-to-origin flows need to sit inside the core orchestration model, not be handled as an exception outside it. Reverse logistics is a daily operational reality in these markets, not an edge case.

Marketplace operating controls

Marketplace SLAs, breach monitoring, auto-cancellation windows and seller-specific workflows need stronger OMS support than most standard implementations provide. The consequences of marketplace SLA failures are direct and measurable.

Inventory confidence management

Not all stock should be treated as equally reliable. The OMS needs ways to reflect different trust levels by node and by process maturity, so that fulfilment promises are made from stock the system can actually depend on.

PART 5

GETTING IT RIGHT

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Where should a leadership team focus when rolling out OMS in these markets?

A few things matter more than the rest.

Start with the order journey, not the application map

Do not begin by asking which system owns which process box. Start by asking where orders fail, where margin leaks, where customer promises break and where operations need better control. The technology decisions follow from honest answers to those questions.

Build a regional template, not a single global one

India and SEA are not the same market. Even within SEA, country-to-country variation is real. A common foundation with genuine market-level flexibility is the right structure. A single global template that is forced to carry too much local variation tends to fragment under the weight of it.

Put operations at the centre of design

OMS programmes are often led by IT, architecture or digital teams. That is understandable, but it creates risk. Operations, customer service, logistics and finance need to shape the design from day one. They are the ones who will live with the consequences of decisions made without them.

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What operational KPIs should we be tracking that most OMS programmes miss?

Most OMS programmes track the obvious metrics: order volumes, fulfilment rates, SLA compliance. In SEA and India, those are necessary but not sufficient. The metrics that reveal where the operation is actually under stress tend to be more granular:

- Failed delivery rate by zone, carrier and order type
- Order confirmation lag between placement and fulfilment release
- Cancellation rate before fulfilment release, segmented by payment method
- Refund turnaround time from return initiation to customer credit
- Return pickup success rate on first attempt
- Marketplace SLA breach rate by platform
- Inventory mismatch rate between system and physical stock by node
- Carrier first-attempt delivery success rate

These metrics do not replace standard OMS reporting. They sit alongside it and reveal the specific failure patterns that this operating environment tends to produce.

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What does the future of OMS look like in SEA and India?

The opportunity is strong, and I think the direction of travel is fairly clear on a few things.

OMS will move closer to real-time. Inventory, carrier capacity, payment confirmation and customer communication will all need to respond faster than most current systems allow. The gap between what happened and what the OMS knows about it needs to close.

Scoring and prediction will become more central to how OMS makes decisions, covering delivery risk, return likelihood, inventory confidence and carrier selection. The systems that use better data to make better decisions at the point of promise will outperform the ones that rely on static rules.

The boundary between OMS, fulfilment orchestration and customer promise management will continue to blur. The OMS is gradually becoming the retail decision engine, not just the order processing layer. That shift is further along in some markets than others, but the direction is consistent.

Quick commerce, same-day expectations and marketplace scale will push operating models to be simpler but sharper. Complexity will still exist underneath, but the systems that win will be the ones that hide it behind good decisions rather than exposing it through operational friction.

And the best platforms will be modular without being over-engineered. The goal is not an elegant architecture diagram. It is better order flow, less leakage, and a business that can move faster.

The opportunity in SEA and India is not to reject Western OMS learning. It is to apply it with the humility to recognise where the environment is different, and adapt accordingly. That is where real OMS value is created, not in theory, but in the daily reality of retail operations.

About GSOT

GSOT is an order management consultancy with 25 years of IBM Sterling implementation experience and more than 50 global retail engagements. Our clients include Burberry, IKEA, Brooks Running and M&S. GSOT OMS is our enterprise-grade order management product, designed for mid-market retailers across South East Asia and India.

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